

Ignotus [Hugó Veigelsberg], "America and culture," *Nyugat* no. 13 (1927).

I would like to ask Spengler what he thinks: has there ever been culture without intellectuality? The way he describes Egypt, it's as if that's the way it would have become. In its spirit, in its core, in its institutions it is indeed similar to that state of civilization which, according to Spengler's manner of distinguishing, one sees with each cultural people [read "Kulturvolk"] or group following up the thousand-year span of the life of culture, like a sort of living death, like the fingernails and beard of a dead man keep growing for a while. Of course it's strange if this nails-and-beard life keeps on longer than the mind-body one was – for example just like according to Spengler it's been doing with the Chinese now for more than a thousand years. Indeed with the Chinese too, if a person considers, intellectuality in its time could not follow up the former original cultural life. There are many expansive charms in their poetry and in their art, but their thought does not go beyond ethics, which in itself is fitting and wise, yet superficial, like every practicum. The Romans cannot be awarded much more – generally the question, in the sense that we understand it today, is whether there was any further intellectual culture like the ancient Indus and the Greek up until Western culture, which in Spengler's judgment is now shuddering its last? And if not, and if this is something that one can more rightfully call humanity from millennium to millennium and day to day, and in the final accounting it still progresses and rises gradually, then perhaps intellectuality is not as important for cultivation as our Western bias believes?

It is certain that once culture and along with it intellectuality are present, they need for there to be some purpose of theirs in the advancement of human welfare. And one needs to think about how between the two intellectual cultures one of them, the Indus, was not able to help its own peoples in any way, nature still raised its primal injustices against them, it brought no remedy against maladies, famines, and droughts, while the dregs of civilizations are now settling in a Gandhism whose lack of intellectuality is greater only than its lack of enterprise. Yet the Greeks, although their intellectuality is obvious, were not something greater in this regard. Pindar's odes do not sing the triumphs of intellect and understanding, but of footraces, and Plato himself was an athlete until late into old age and his grasp of life was in no way the bookworm's. There is no trace anywhere that they would have made intellectuality into a prerogative in the way that today's Europeans cannot give up regarding America as a world of barbarians, just because its human services happen not to be for the greater good and are not of an intellectual nature.

It is time to abandon such arrogance. It is true that America today is not yet a world of contemplative loftiness. Although its architecture is starting to become stronger than Europe's, in the matter of art it does not run high. But that is not everything in the end. Europeans have still not given an account to themselves, who these people are that created America and what they mean for the rest of humanity. We are taken aback at the rigid commercial mentality that is the real American soul and we do not want to notice that in this system of theirs a new breed of practical socialism has formed in America which has attained more than our theory-based social-socialism in the matter of raising as many as possible into a more humane situation. We become enraged at the ingenuously vile monkey trials and do not see what a relief it is that American tolerance sets an example to religiosity in differentiating itself from the church.

The newspapers bring up American divorce statistics in their humor columns and we fail to appreciate what a vile captivity America (here always understood as the U.S.A.) has broken by treating the institution of marriage as a reality not worth fussing over. We find fault with the eccentricities of American women, with the unruliness and the untutored nature of American children, and are blind about how woman's clothing today, which the world has America to thank,

has done so much more for the true emancipation of women than all European emancipation and suffrage-ism (sic), and how getting people to place value in a child, something that has come over from America to us, is a more productive revolution than those in which Europeans are used to being, ones which end up taking the heads of the unsuccessful people. There is to be sure much barbarity still in America, and it is neither a gentle nor elevated world. But beginning in its constitution, which by way of a living institution is able to render operative the legislative and executive will of the people, and in the civil war, which abolished slavery without regret, it has, with the abolition of a caste-like system, with the neutralization of the churches, with the miscegenation of types turning into a nation, with the breaking of women and children's servitude, brought to completion seven or eight such revolutions and expanded further, each of which is worth as much as the Renaissance or the great French revolution.

And all of this pales alongside what the global adjudicating role of technology is starting to mean. Whether its core is already American like the flying machine or the telephone, or its terrain like railroads and shipping, this is what America or American influence and necessity have developed up to its present might.

What benefit did either the Greeks themselves or the peoples and nations living with them on the earth gain from Greek brilliance, which also got as far as inventing a bunch of machines, without having wrought anything else with these machines other than to have played with them? In the Greek world itself life only had human worth for a small minority as well, and the rest of the world simply had no impact. In much later times Greek culture [*műveltség*] influenced first the Arab and then the Christian world. This should clearly not be discounted and one must not forget that at the base of today's technological development there is the body of learning which for us is of Greek origin – in a word, that today's America would not have come about without ancient Greece. But then in turn we must take this America into account, and not condescend because it is not Greece. Technology can create what the intellectual could not: Humanity. The speed with which people have come toward each other means more than convenience: it means mutual affinity, unavoidability, concern for one another, mixing with one another. In a world whose every corner is known and reachable within two days, it will be impossible for a single nation to live separately from the others, for a single fate to stay untouched by others, and for a single misfortune to remain unaided. It cannot be that so many millions could perish in hunger, it cannot be that anyone can make another destitute for long, and it cannot be, most of all, that death can hold sway in this or that locale while life goes on elsewhere. This is what Spengler forgets when he is able to imagine for today what he reckons was experienced in the past, that with the demise or senility of a people cultures take away and extract what had made that culture flower of itself. Whatever might come to pass today, the whole world has been making one home [“married”] for a long time, [becoming] more new peoples or a common humanity, like China today is already starting to relate to Europe as to America, and cannot remain in its own “civilization” vis-à-vis their respective “cultures.” By the same token the Russian world is not going to be able to maintain its own particularity, and whatever this new culture of theirs might emerge for, whatever Spengler expects from it, it has already been cultivating this culture along with the rest of the world for a long time now. If Spengler sees the future form of “civilization” in the “city,” then perhaps in his personal life he will live to see the miracle that the whole world will be a city and from its civilization culture will emerge. World culture – the first since the world has been the world. And it will be thanks to America, which gave the impetus down this path with commercial-mindedness and technology, and without the intellectual and the artistic.

Translation: KH